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DE RUEHIK #0042/01 1260710
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0337
INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS PRIORITY 0247
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLAD COLLECTIVE
RUEHIK/AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI 0377

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 THESSALONIKI 000042

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DEPT FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SMIG](#) [MK](#) [GR](#)

SUBJECT: NORTHERN NOTES - APRIL 2008

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Following is a summary of last month's major developments in Northern Greece:

GoG REMAINS COMMITTED TO PRIVATISATION OF THESSALONIKI PORT, DESPITE STRIKES AND RESULTING LOSSES

11. After an April 1 meeting with the Thessaloniki Port Authority, Minister of Merchant Marine Giorgos Voulgarakis stated that the continuing strikes, which are about to enter their fifth month, will not affect the government's plans to proceed with the leasing of the city's port. Voulgarakis reiterated that the deadline for the tender remains May 15. Meanwhile, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Northern Greece conducted a survey, which revealed that 96% of the interviewed businesses have experienced delays since the strikes and work slowdowns began, that 52% have lost clients, that 27% have had to reduce production and that 6% have laid off staff. Despite their current problems, 57% of the businesses surveyed remain in favor of the privatization plan but 67% blamed the Port Authority for its poor handling of workers' reactions to the privatization plan.

EU PARLIAMENT DISCUSSION ON "THE IGNORED MINORITIES IN GREECE" DRAWS STRONG REACTIONS FROM GREEK OFFICIALS

12. On April 17, a discussion was held at the European Parliament, entitled "The Ignored Minorities in Greece: Western Thrace Turks and Macedonians." It was organized by the "Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe" and "Rainbow" - a political party of the Macedonian Minority in Greece. The discussion was arranged for and supported by the European Parliament group EFA/The Greens. Greek media described the one-day session as an effort to create tension in the region and another instrument of the U.S. "Divide and Rule" policy. Greek officials also objected to the fact that a representative of their government was not invited to the meeting. Despite their initial concerns about the session, however, the Greek side was pleased with the final outcome when the table was turned on the "Western Thrace Turks" by representatives of the Thrace Roma and Pomak communities. The Roma and Pomak spokespersons noted that they are sometimes pressured by the Turkish-origin Muslim in Thrace to abandon their separate identity and be subsumed in the Turkish Muslim community. The organizers stated that they were also happy with the attendance and exposure of the initiative.

MEDIA CONCERNED BY FOUR NEW MUSLIM ASSOCIATIONS IN THRACE AND OPERATION OF 200 "HATRED-INCITING" WEBSITES

¶3. The media in Thrace have criticized the legal establishment of four new Muslim associations dedicated to health, education and cultural issues in the minority community. Critics suggest that the planned activities of these associations should more appropriately be handled by the Ministries of Education and Health and that their establishment is an effort to create a "parallel state" in the area, "under the guidance of the Turkish Consulate General." The latter was also "behind," according to other reports, over 200 websites that made reference to "one national minority in Thrace" and included inflammatory content about Greek affairs and the country's relationship with Turkey.

CONTROVERSY OVER THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SHARI'A LAW IN THRACE'S MUSLIM COMMUNITY'S AFFAIRS

¶4. A recent court decision in favor of a Muslim woman in Komotini who was disputing a property inheritance with her brother sparked a debate over the implementation of Shari'a law in the affairs of the Muslim community. Most commentators argued that Islamic law should only be practiced within the context of the Greek constitution. An Islamic cleric noted that respect for diversity should be "the cornerstone of democracy." Muslim politicians said that they would not object to the potential abolition of the law, if there was consent for the change from the Muslim community. Discussion of this contentious issue is likely to continue.

U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT PRAISED OVER INCLUSION OF THE POMAKS IN ITS HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

¶5. The reference to the Pomak community for the first time in the annual State Department's Human Rights Report, was received with positive commentaries by most Greek media, especially local media in Thrace. Commentators considered it a very positive development for the community and expressed satisfaction that the references constituted acceptance of the community's existence and also that the report included reference to Pomak representatives' complaints about intimidation and even persecution by members of the Turkophone community. The common

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suggestion of commentators was that the Greek government should follow suit and become more supportive of its Pomak citizens. In another Pomak related development, "Zagalisa," a Pomak newspaper that according to its editor was "forced to close" after threats by Turkophone Muslims, has re-opened after seven years, to the publicly expressed delight of the editor of the other Pomak newspaper in the region, "NatPresh".

ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS ARRESTS IN EVROS AND THESSALONIKI

¶6. After a car chase from Evros to Thessaloniki, four Iraqi smugglers and a Syrian smuggler were arrested, along with four illegal immigrants. According to reports in the local press, one of the Iraqis was the head of an illegal immigrant smuggling ring. Later in the month, five illegal immigrants and three Greek smugglers were arrested in Evros. The immigrants were reportedly headed for Sweden. Separately, Interior Minister Pavlopoulos announced in an EU meeting on immigration that Greek authorities made 19,741 arrests of illegal immigrants in 2008. He also added that Greece is the fourth country in the EU, in the number of asylum applications received.

TRAFFICKING FIGURES ANNOUNCED IN CONFERENCE IN KOMOTINI

¶7. During a conference entitled "Trafficking: Modern Slavery," the Secretary General for Equality Tsoumani revealed that there are currently around 17,000 female victims of trafficking in Greece, and over a million men have had sex with one of them. According to "informal research" cited by the speaker, 62% of those questioned partly blame the victims for their predicament. And in a recently tried trafficking case in Thessaloniki, the three perpetrators of the trafficking and torture of a 38-year old Bulgarian woman (also Bulgarian) were all handed heavy

sentences in a Thessaloniki court this month.
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